



Daily News for Recruitment Professionals

<http://www.recruiterdaily.com.au>

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## **LOOK 'FIRST CLASS' ON ECONOMY BUDGET**

**By Elena Reed, style & image consultant [www.evolutzia.com.au](http://www.evolutzia.com.au)**

It's easy to look good when you have limitless funds, but when you're not cashed up it takes innovation, tenacity and determination, according to style and image expert, Elena Reed.

Reed, whose consultancy Evolutzia has groomed and dressed more than 5000 Australians, urges recruiters to support their expertise with a memorable visual brand, saying: "If you cannot be forgotten, you'll be in demand."

Here are her tips on how to "look first class on an economy budget".

### **Budget Tip One: What's first - the clothes or the wearer?**

A five-star hotel experience starts with impeccable reception; a luxurious getaway begins with a VIP flight. In the world of personal branding, clothes make a man but it's the man who makes or breaks the look of the clothes.

Your hair and your hands are the crown jewels in the kingdom of first class dressing. Whatever your financial position, you need to take good care of them.

This doesn't mean that you have to become a regular at your local nail bar. A DIY manicure and some hand cream will ensure you can offer a confident and pleasant handshake. Boys: it's OK to buff up those rugged paws. The state of your hands is a giveaway to your life. Are you a labourer or a professional? A school girl or a business woman?

Your hair, though, is a different story. DIY is not recommended here. Don't be afraid to spend a little more to get a good cut. Your hairstyle is a window to your character - do I see your eyes or are they hidden under unruly nightclub tresses? Do I hear what you say or is your broom-like hairdo speaking louder than you do?

### **Budget Tip Two: Closet confidential**

As boring as it seems when you think about that pair of trousers you just spotted in the store window, shopping in your own closet is the best trick known to first-class dressers on a budget. All you need is a couple of hours of spare time and a pair of fresh eyes, yours or invited. Ready to give it a go?

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First, rescue your loved and forgotten possessions from the dark depths of your wardrobe. Don't be surprised to uncover your school formal outfit residing alongside your first-date shirt.

Next, try on and assess every garment you own. Ask yourself: How can I make it look better? Does a sleeve need to be shortened? Hem taken up? Shape altered? Fluff removed? Dry cleaners visited? Colour changed? Buttons swapped? Belt updated? Polish given? Shoulder pads fixed?

No doubt, with a bit of patience you can turn those old favourites into first-class creations without spending much.

### **Budget Tip Three: Sales, sweet sales**

It must be nice always to shop in designer boutiques with assistants to fulfill your every wish. Shopping during sales is a different matter. What turns reasonable people into a roaring crowd of mindless super-buyers? What do they plan to do with those acid yellow cowboy boots that are two sizes too small?

Love them or hate them, sales are the way to go when you are not at your richest. This kind of shopping, though, requires perseverance, clear focus and a sharp mind. Concentrate on the things you need, not on the discounts you want.

When your blood is pumping as you imagine yourself in a \$900 jacket (now \$100!) take a deep breath and ask yourself:

1. Do I love it madly and need it badly?
2. Would I buy it for the full price without a second thought?
3. Do I have three other things in my wardrobe I can wear it with?

If the answer is no, compose yourself and walk away. Let some other bargain hunter have post-purchase remorse over their 'fantastic' buy.

### **Budget Tip Four: Stop the flop**

A young woman gets lost on a stormy night. She walks into a castle and claims she is a princess. Is she really? Her wet dress looks more like a dirty rag. But check out her shoes. They'll tell you where she belongs.

The story has its moral. Your shoes are the signals of your personal success. These, along with your handbag and watch, are the signs of your professional achievement. They need to be right for your age, match your position and be congruent with your brand.

As you get better with age, just like good cheese and wine, your standing changes too. Visualise abundance for three things to come into your life:

- a designer bag - think neutral colour, minimum detailing and a timeless style;

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- two pairs of outstanding shoes - make them Italian leather, the highest quality you can afford, and a classic shape; and

- an elegant watch - gold or silver finish, in proportion to your body size and a reputable brand.

The bad news? You can't fake it. Don't try to fool a discerning eye. The good news is you'll actually save money. One decent bag is better than five mediocre ones. Don't let little things flop you in a big way.

### **Budget Tip Five: Accessorise, successorise**

When you move to a new place do you often find yourself buying vanilla candles or funky posters to make it feel like home - using inexpensive touches to create individuality?

A wardrobe on a budget is about the same philosophy. Items like jackets, pants and skirts are your property investments. Shirts, ties and jewellery are your 'change-the-look' dollar savers.

When it comes to accessories, it's important to know 'the rules':

First it's the scale. Your bone structure comes into play. Large watches are for big guys. Small earrings are for petite girls.

Next, it's the face line. Got the angles? Go for striped patterns and edgy jewellery. More softness? It's vice versa.

Finally, it's your face. Loud shoes draw attention down. Not good when you're trying to connect. A fabulous tie gets attention up - handy for ease of communication.

Crack the numbers by shopping smart. Bargain at the markets. So many choices; not too much to pay. Click away at ebay. A tie is a tie as long as it's made of silk.

### **Budget Tip Six: Face control**

Oscar Wilde once said, "A man's face is his autobiography", and a century later, Dr Gordon Patzer proved good-looking people are judged to be more talented, kind and honest. Is it shallow? Yep. Can you ignore it? Better not to.

Your face can be a magnet or a turn off, more so in the initial stages of interaction. Don't worry if you can't rival Brad Pitt's sex appeal - it's the façade of a well groomed person - not the presence of physical beauty - that others find attractive.

Smooth skin is the 'it' part of a first-class look. The right products are a must for a cashmere-soft complexion. Can they come on a budget? Yes, with a bit of

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a plan. Visit a trusted beautician to learn what type of skin you have, what products suit you best, and how to use them. First step accomplished. Say thank you and leave. It may feel cheeky, but you have your financial health to consider!

Now it's time for an online hit. Most brands are much cheaper on sites like [strawberrynet](#) and [skincarestore](#). Happy shopping!